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ART. V. *A letter to the Honourable John Pickering, on the subject of his Vocabulary ; or collection of words and phrases, supposed to be peculiar to the United States of America. By Noah Webster.* Boston, published by West & Richardson, pp. 40.

WHEN Mr. Pickering's Vocabulary was published, we recommended it with great cheerfulness, believing that its design was good, and that its execution, both for extent of research, and for the modesty of its decisions, was deserving of high commendation. Though we endeavoured to expound the great objects of the work, so that they might not be misunderstood, and to correct certain misapprehensions concerning them, which we thought were unfounded, we did not think it necessary to give a minute and elaborate examination of the vocabulary ; because it seemed to us that the plan must approve itself to all who wish to maintain the purity of the English language, and that few if any words are discountenanced, that are worthy to be adopted.

Mr. Webster, however, in reading the vocabulary, found many things which he thought worthy of animadversion, and, as he apprehended, some erroneous opinions, which he ought to correct. But he is extremely abhorrent from controversy, and indeed abjures it altogether ; though, if we understand the meaning of the word, he has consented *this once* to be engaged in *controverting* certain opinions. There is another ground too on which he wavered, previously to his final resolution to publish his remarks upon the vocabulary ; concerning which we give his own words.

“ The unfriendly dispositions manifested towards me by men of high standing in the republic of letters, and particularly in this Commonwealth, and the virulence with which every effort to detect errors in long received opinions has hitherto been assailed ; a virulence by no means compatible with a candid desire of improvement, and probably not warranted by the low estimate which even my opposers have formed of my talents, labors and public services ; these dispositions, affording little ground to expect that any remarks of mine would have a salutary influence upon public opinion, have, at times, disposed me to withhold all scriptures upon philological subjects, till I can prepare a more critical and extended treatise, than has yet been exhibited to the public.”

Virulence is too harsh a term for Mr. W. to apply to his

opposers ; for if they have sometimes been too uncourteous and severe in their strictures, their hostility was directed against his supposed errors ; and the dangerous tendency of his philological speculations. Unless we believe not only, as he asserts, that “ he has pushed his inquiries in philology probably much farther than any other man,” but also, as he seems to imply, that no one else has acquired knowledge enough, or become possessed of means sufficient, to authorize him to be a judge in the case, we cannot conceive that Mr. Webster's decisions are in every instance so sacred, as not to be questioned by less hallowed lips. He has always been learning, and he is, unquestionably, (we speak with respect,) very learned. But the history of his own literary labours, and the experience of those revolutions in certain opinions which he has had the candour publicly to confess, we should think must have taught him the fallibility of his decisions, and the possibility of his falling into new mistakes, which further researches will enable him to correct. In regard to the mass of readers, there is something very imposing in high pretensions to excellence ; but there is also a class, that will not allow an author to mark for himself the degree to which he rises in the scale of merit ; and perhaps it is wiser, in general, to suffer those who are capable of judging impartially, (and it is to be supposed that there are such in every department of learning,) to become the arbiters, and thus to save the confident from the trouble of vaunting their own claims to superiority, and to give modest merit its due reward.

Besides the remarks on Mr. Pickering's Vocabulary contained in Mr. Webster's letter, it comprises much extraneous matter, with which the author of the Vocabulary has no concern. We shall first notice those parts of the letter, which regard the plan and the merits of the Vocabulary.

“ The words in your collection,” says Mr. W. “ and others of doubtful authority, may be comprised under the following heads.

“ 1. New words.

“ 2. Words acknowledged to be legitimate; to which new significations are annexed.

“ 3. Words of local use, under which may be arranged obsolete words, or rather obsolescent words ; for, if words be entirely obsolete, they no longer belong to a living language.”

Under the first head, in answer to Mr. Pickering's asser-

tion, that "we [Americans] have formed some new words," Mr. W. says,

"You cannot, by this expression, mean words radically new, or from new roots : for this, I am confident, is not true. And let me remark, Sir, that in this sense, probably, no new words have been introduced, either into the English or into any other language, since the dispersion of men. I have examined nearly twenty languages, or rather dialects, (for all languages are dialects of one primitive language,) from the beginning of the alphabet to the end, and some of them many times, and I have not found reason to believe that any new roots, or new families of words, have been introduced since the dispersion—or a period immediately succeeding that event. And this observation may serve to show the inaccuracy of your phraseology, when you speak of a *radical change* of language, (pages 10 and 20.) No *radical change* of any language has ever taken place."

Mr. Webster, while on the one hand he has seized upon a term which was not intended to be used in a strictly technical sense, has, on the other, taken occasion to hazard a bold assertion, by which he seems in some respects to exceed what we had thought was the hyperbolical description of poetical fancy ;

"Those learn'd philologists, who chace
A panting syllable through time and space,
Start it at home, and hunt it in the dark
To Gaul, to Greece, and into Noah's ark."

He passes with extreme facility from negation to affirmation ; from telling us, that he has found no reason, after the examination of nearly twenty languages, or dialects, to believe that any new roots, or new families of words have been introduced since the dispersion ;—to the unqualified assertion, that no radical change of any language has ever taken place. The ignorant are said to be very credulous ; and therefore we suppose Mr. W. will think that we know only just enough to be presumptuous, when we require proofs of the lineal descent of the various families of words now in existence. A few examples of hereditary succession, however satisfactory they might be, would not, in our estimation, be conclusive in favour of such a comprehensive assertion, as that which we have quoted ; but, as it would be so endless a task to pass through all the gradations, in tracing a great portion of words from the primitive language down

to our times, we would propose the Greek for example, and request Mr. W. to give us the genealogical descent of the various families in its vocabulary, from the original language. It would not perhaps be liberal to quote Mr. W. against himself upon this subject; for though he once thought that the etymology of most words is wholly lost, yet if he has since discovered instances enough to convince him that the contrary is true, and that the etymology of most words has been or can be found, his change of opinion does him no discredit; though we may be allowed at present to believe, that his fancy, and his conjectures, and his torture of the consonants, and his violence to the organs of speech, may have done much to bring him to this astonishing result.

We can see no propriety in departing from the common meaning of the terms *language* and *dialect*, when used in contradistinction from each other. No one calls English, French, and German, the same language; and for a very good reason, as we think; namely, because a person, to whom only one of them is vernacular, cannot speak or write any thing to a person in similar circumstances in regard to either of the two others, which shall be at all intelligible; and hence, with strict propriety, they are different *languages* or *tongues*. And to call the English, for instance, a dialect of the Hebrew or Samaritan, or of whatever Mr. W. may discover to be the primitive tongue, would be a most extraordinary departure from the use of the word. Equally absurd would it be to call it a dialect either of the Saxon or of the French, merely because we are obliged to resort to one of them for the etymology of so many of our words.

With this view of the case, to whatever objection the term *radical change* may be liable, we cannot, like Mr. Webster, consider the instance mentioned by Mr. Pickering, of the Spanish and Portuguese, an unfortunate one. On the contrary, it appears to us an instance, perfectly well chosen, and suited to illustrate his reasoning; namely, that if the people of Spain and Portugal, “notwithstanding their vicinity and frequent intercourse, have at length formed distinct languages; it is extremely probable, that the people of the United States and of England, countries so remote from each other, will also experience the same thing, unless great pains should be taken to guard against it.” That the Spanish and Portuguese are distinct languages, no one will deny, who

admits what we have already said on this subject ; and as far as we wish to preserve the English language in its purity, so far such an example of diversity, in what was once the same, is a useful warning.

Respecting Mr. Webster's remarks upon the "modes of forming derivatives from a radix, or parent word," we do not disagree with him ; and as there is here no contest between him and other philologists and lexicographers, it is unnecessary to spend time upon the subject, any farther than to guard against a needless multiplication of words, formed upon the analogical principles laid down.

In this connexion, Mr. Webster speaks of the word *lengthy* ; which, he says, "is regularly formed from length, with a genuine affix, as wealthy, healthy, pithy, holy, are from their primitives. It is, therefore, a legitimate word. It is not exactly synonymous with *long*, as it expresses a moderate degree of length, and is more limited in its application. For these reasons it will, probably, maintain its ground."

Such is the singular pertinacity of those, who claim to enrich our language by words of local origin. *Long* is the adjective that corresponds with *length*, in the same manner as *strong* with *strength*. *Breadth*, *height* and *depth* have their adjectives, broad, high, deep. Now, unless the distinction Mr. W. makes between *lengthy* and *long* be well founded, we can see no reason for adopting what many consider a vulgar word ; and, if it be well founded, we may perhaps soon have *strengthy*, *breadthy*, *heighty*, and *depthy*. But we are entirely unable to perceive the accuracy of the subtle refinement on this word. If it be regularly formed like wealthy, healthy, &c. why does not the analogy exist throughout ? Why is it not used in a positive or absolute state, instead of being a diminutive, or of forming an intermediate degree of comparison ? We are here reminded of one of Mr. Webster's improvements in his *Philosophical and Practical Grammar* ; in quoting which we shall not incur his displeasure, since he has so often referred to his grammar in his letter. In his grammar, he says, "there are four degrees of comparison. The first denotes a *slight* degree of the quality, and is expressed by the termination *ish*, as *reddish*," &c. Few words at present have this termination, expressing a *slight* degree, and *lengthy* is the only word cited, which, by its termination, expresses a *moderate* degree ; so that it is either *sui generis*, or it belongs to the first degree of com-

parison. There is not in the nature of the case any definite limitation in regard to the number of the degrees of comparison; but as there are two only besides the positive state, which are necessary, and which are distinctly marked, it seems better to leave our *y*'s and our *ishes* out of the case, and not open the way for the multiplication of a class of words, which would not add much to accuracy of speech, but would greatly impair its beauty.

The *second head*, in Mr. Webster's division, regards *new applications of legitimate words*.

"Under this head," he says, "the inhabitants of this country will necessarily take some license. Nor will new applications of terms be confined to Americans: Englishmen will, occasionally, indulge the use of them."—"But Americans are under the necessity of using a greater latitude, in this respect, than Englishmen. In this country new objects, new ideas, and associations of ideas, compel us, either to invent new terms, or to use English words in a new sense. The latter mode is preferable, and has generally been adopted."

The truth and justice of the remark we readily admit, though we differ from the author in particular instances.

The word *locate*, which he cites, we observed, in our review of the Vocabulary, may be useful, to denote *the surveying and fixing of the boundaries of unsettled lands*, as Mr. Webster defines it; but no sooner had it acquired this kind of technical use, than almost every thing was *located*. But in regard to *presidential*, *congressional* and *associational*, we must say, that we have never had occasion to use them, and that they have no charms of sound for our ears. Nor can we perceive any ground of preference for the terms *congressional* or *associational* acts or proceedings, to the terms acts or proceedings of Congress or of an association.

"Under this head," says Mr. W. "may be classed the conversion of nouns into verbs," a subject concerning which he seems to be very splenetick, and is quite sarcastick upon what he calls the *nibbling gentry*. He does not, we presume, mean to say that every noun may be used as a verb, at every writer's pleasure. Whether *test* will maintain its ground, and acquire general favour, or the contrary, is a matter of little importance; but the latitude which Mr. W. gives to all sorts of pretenders in literature, upon this subject, is deserving of notice. "This mode of forming verbs [from

nouns] is one of the most useful inventions in language ; and, in every living language, the process may be, and actually is, carried on indefinitely, not only without injury, but with immense advantage. To arrest the progress of it would be a real evil." A far greater evil we apprehend would be incurred by this indefinite license, than can result from the attempt to check the progress of this method of forming verbs ; and we are convinced that any one, who will try the experiment upon a number of nouns, that are not already used as verbs, will be satisfied that, in most cases, whatever might be gained in brevity, much would be lost as well in respect to perspicuity, as in variety and agreeableness of diction.

Here let us pause for one moment, and listen to our infallible guide in philology. "There is," says he, "no part of this subject, on which criticism has betrayed such profound ignorance of the principles on which language is formed, as on this of the conversion of nouns into verbs." Mr. W. rarely makes any exceptions in charges of this kind ; but, if this were a solitary example, we should probably pass it by with a smile. He seems every where to consider himself the great schoolmaster in his art, under whom there are no deserving pupils ; and he goes about the forms feruling and flippling the dunces, and calling blockhead, as familiarly as *Busby*. Now he puts Johnson in the corner, and anon Harris receives a box in the ear, and Horne Took is most ungratefully kicked out of doors. But what mighty occasion is there for discipline upon this subject of converting nouns into verbs ? It is not a right derived from discovery ; for we presume no critick in language is ignorant, that most verbs, when stripped of all artificial changes and appendages, are the same as nouns ; and Shakspeare, though no professed grammarian, was perfectly familiar with the art of converting nouns into verbs.

"His own letter only
Must fetch in whom he *papers*."

That is, whom he notes on paper. And again,

"I do *estate* unto Demetrius."

"The good mind of Camillo *tardied*
My swift command."

"If thou *thouest* him some thrice, it shall not be amiss."

Whenever any verbs are introduced, which have not been sanctioned by use, they are fair subjects of criticism, and every one is at liberty to favour or discountenance them. If Mr. Webster directs his labourers to *yard* his cattle, *spade* his garden, or *bridge* his brooks, he is at liberty to do it, though we think it better spoken, than written.

In regard to "*local, and obsolete or obsolescent words*," Mr. Webster's remarks, with a few qualifications, may be readily approved. Peculiarities in the condition and circumstances of a country, separated from the parent stock, differing in its government and customs, and having its own inventions and improvements, in things contributing to convenience, and to the advancement of society, in whatever is useful, will sometimes give occasion for new terms ; but let necessity, or some obvious advantage, be the criterion by which they are tried. It is desirable for both countries to have the same names for the same things ; and where there is diversity, let the term be as descriptive as possible. We do not perceive that, under this head, in which he includes obsolescent words, Mr. W. intends any reflection on the Vocabulary, unless he considers it useless. For ourselves we repeat, that the laborious and successful endeavours of Mr. Pickering to collect these words, and trace them to their origin, are highly gratifying to our curiosity ; for we found, to a much greater extent, than we had before conceived, that they were brought hither by our fathers. It is not always easy to determine what is useful ; but if this part of the Vocabulary be pronounced useless, we may, at least with equal justice, deny the utility of Mr. Webster's boasted etymological discoveries.

After his preliminary observations, Mr. W. subjoins his remarks on some particular words in the Vocabulary. We cannot follow him through the whole catalogue, and shall therefore select only such as may seem to us to afford occasion for the most useful remarks.

Accountableness and *accountability*, says Mr. W. are equally well formed and legitimate words. The same remark is made upon *profanity* and *profaneness* ; and the remark in each case is just ; but it shows at the same time, that one of the forms is unnecessary, because, between the two, there is no difference of signification. It is better in such instances to adhere to the form in common use, and then we shall be sure not to give offence.

Bestowment we do not think far preferable to *bestowal* ; and the latter is as well formed ; like *avowal*, *disposal*.

Calculate, Mr. W. acknowledges, is often misapplied in vulgar practice. We think, however, that his explanation of its meaning in the phrase, "I calculate to do such a thing," tends rather to encourage the vulgar practice ; for it is not probable that those who use it in such a phrase, go through the same logical analysis ; namely, "I am disposing my affairs, or making dispositions or arrangements in my mind, always implying an estimate of facts and circumstances, that precede." Whenever we have heard it used in the manner here quoted, it has been used for *expect* or *intend*.

Clever, says Mr. W. "is used by the English in its true sense ; but the transition from the qualities of the body to those of the mind, is very easy, natural, and common." The fault however among our countrymen is, that, when they apply it to man, the true meaning of the word is disregarded, and the one newly acquired usurps its place.

Conduct. This verb is often found among us without the reciprocal pronoun, in such a phrase, as, *he conducts well*. This is a violation of established custom. *Behave* and *act*, cited by Mr. Webster, are not analogous.

Keep, says Mr. W., for *stay*, *abide*, *remain*, is perfectly etymological ; but the etymology is not the subject of inquiry. The proper question to be settled between the author of the Vocabulary, and the author of the Letter is, whether we have not departed from the English use of the word.

Loan, "as a verb, is etymologically the true word. *Lend* is the corruption. The noun was first formed from an oriental root. Saxon, *laen* ; German, *lehen* ; Dutch, *leen* ; Swedish, *laen* ; Danish *laan*—and from the noun in all these languages, is formed the verb, to *loan*. So little do the English understand their native language, that they suppose our use of the word as a verb to be a corruption."

Can a man of Mr. Webster's understanding take pleasure in such a *quixotick* sort of triumph ? As we did not expect to meet him on etymological ground, we are not armed with all the lexicons which, on his part, he has brought with him into the encounter. Our German dictionary however tells us, that *lehen* or *lehn* signifies a *fee* or *feodal tenure* ; also an *investiture*, &c. *Lehnen*, as a verb, is used like the English *lend* ; and, as a noun, for the *lending* of a thing. Our Swedish lexicon has no such word as *laen*. But granting the ety-

mology to be correct, still Mr. W. appears to be out of breath to little purpose. The English have the noun *loan*, and the verb *lend*; the verb having in this case varied, as it often does, from the noun. Custom has established this variety; and consequently *loan*, as a verb, is a corruption. Now let us ask the friends of good English, which is the greater offence, to corrupt the Saxon, German, Dutch, Swedish, and Danish, or to corrupt their own language? We feel some pride in a language that we claim as our own, and have no disposition to restore it any nearer to the Saxon, or any other language, than it is now. We make these remarks once for all, as we cannot spend time to examine all the words of late introduction, which in their orthography, or in their sense, Mr. Webster pronounces to be *etymologically correct*.

Notify. Mr. Webster acknowledges that this word has deviated from the English sense; and vindicates the American use of it only by saying, that the deviation is not greater than in many other cases, which are well authorized.

Progress, as a verb, Mr. Webster has the magnanimity to pronounce *unnecessary*; and *fellowship*, as a verb, he treats with deserved dislike.

Spell. Mr. Webster says that "the primary sense of this word is *a turn*. Hence the phrase 'to spell one,' to take his turn. We have had a long *turn* of bad weather, or a *spell* of bad weather." Whether this be the primary sense or not, it is now vulgar, and even Bailey quotes only *sailors* for this use of the word. However, our philologist proceeds to dogmatize: "The criticisms on this word, and most others called vulgar, evince the profound ignorance of the ablest scholars, in regard to the real origin of words. They have never penetrated below the surface of this subject."

Systemize. "Here," says Mr. W. with no great courtesy, "your English friend misleads you. *Systemize* is not a corruption of *systematize*—the latter is the corruption." We shall not repeat what we have already said upon the difference between Mr. Webster's notions of corruption and ours, under the word *loan*. Whatever perverseness he may ascribe to us, it is still our belief, that his favourite pursuits have been the means of warping his judgment, upon this subject. We recollect to have seen or heard *systemize* upon some occasion; so we have heard *kissself*, and *theirselves*, and this *mean*; but we ascribed it all to affectation and ped-

antry. *Systematize* is the form which custom has established. The substantive, indeed, system, (συστημα) happened to be translated; but the verb was formed upon the original; so also the adjective, *systematical*, and the adverb *systematically*. If the verb had been formed from the English noun, it would have been very well, and *systemize* would have been a good word; but as it has happened otherwise, it falls into the same class as *dogmatize* and *stigmatize*, whose nouns could not be so well translated into an English form.

The words here selected from Mr. Webster, with his remarks, are sufficient to shew some of the essential differences of opinion between him and ourselves. The mysteries of etymology have little concern with them, and any one, who is tolerably conversant with philological inquiries, is capable of judging between us. But Mr. Webster, after his review of the Vocabulary, "questions the necessity or use of such a collection of words and remarks, in any other respect, than as a matter of curiosity." We subjoin an abridged account of his reasons.

"*First.* The man who undertakes to censure others for the use of words, and to decide what is or is not correct in language, seems to arrogate to himself a dictatorial authority, the legitimacy of which will always be denied.

"*Secondly.* Very few men are competent to decide upon what is national practice; and still fewer, upon what is radically correct in language. Even men of the most erudition are rarely qualified for these purposes. I know by great extent of research, that the *most learned* men in the British nation have very narrow views of this subject. Young men, who have just left college, are the most prompt and confident in their decisions, on these subjects, as I know by *experience*, as well as by *observation*. As they advance in life, they gradually detect their own mistakes, and abate in their dogmatism.

"*Thirdly.* But the most weighty objection against any attempts to fix a limit to the use of words and phrases, is its utter impracticability. Analogy, custom, and habit form a better rule to guide men in the use of words, than any tribunal of men. The force of analogy and custom every man must know and feel—but my investigations have unfolded to me views of this subject, new and astonishing."

Such, in part, is the process by which Mr. W. attempts to prove, that Mr. Pickering has been employed merely in

amusing himself and the publick : and even to the amusement, he will hardly allow the praise of being innocent. Every one has a right to the choice of his pursuit, and if it be harmless, and especially in any degree useful, he deserves no reproach for the selection, or for a certain degree of partiality to the object of his choice. Mr. Webster's favourite pursuit is etymology ; and he seems to be jealous of the slightest interference, and to view the approach of every one as a trespass upon the ground he has preoccupied. Has the author of the Vocabulary "arrogated to himself a dictatorial authority?" No production within our knowledge is less deserving of such a charge. It is not dogmatical ; it is free from egotism. The sole attempt is to ascertain what words our countrymen use, and in what significations, that are not authorized by custom and good authority, in the land of our fathers : and we are exculpated by it from many false charges, which were grounded in ill nature or misapprehension.

But "very few men are competent to decide upon what is national practice ; and still fewer upon what is radically correct in language." This remark is limited still farther—to the *most learned*. The most learned men, however, must in all their written productions decide these points for themselves. Their gratitude, indeed, is due to Mr. Webster, whenever, by his learned labours and deep researches, he enables them to detect a mistake, or avoid an error. We are by no means disposed to deny him the praise of learning ; and, to a certain degree, of useful learning ; but we cannot allow that he has a lawful claim to be considered as the *sole dictator* in the use of speech. Does he claim any thing less ? and does he not claim this without reserve ? He seems never even to suspect that he has any competitor in his province ; it is he alone of the *most learned*, if we interpret his language rightly, (and we should like to make it mean less, if possible,) who has escaped from the thralldom of narrow prejudices ; who knows, from his *extensive researches*, the errors of the *most learned*, and who discovers every thing that is discovered on this subject, which is *new* and *astonishing*. For custom, analogy and habit, however, he expresses his respect. Here we coincide ; and here we think him not altogether consistent with himself, when, by the application of etymological rules, he would supplant some of the best established words in the language, in favour of those, which are comparatively strangers.

We have already observed, that Mr. Webster has introduced much extraneous matter into his letter to Mr. Pickering; but whatever of this kind has not yet drawn from us any remarks, we must treat in a very brief and cursory manner.

The objections made to *comptroller* and *island*, as barbarous words, because they have not the true English orthography, are just, though the first we should hardly think a subject worthy of legislation. Nor do we object to the disappearance of *k* at the end of such words as *public* and *music*. But in general, as it regards orthography, the following remarks of Johnson always appeared to us to be both wise and unostentatious. "I have attempted," he says, "few alterations, and, among those few, perhaps the greater part is from the modern to the ancient practice; and I hope I may be allowed to recommend to those, whose thoughts have been perhaps employed too anxiously on verbal singularities, not to disturb upon narrow views, or for minute propriety, the orthography of their fathers. It has been asserted, that for the law to be *known*, is of more importance than to be *right*. Change, says *Hooker*, is not made without inconvenience, even from worse to better." From similar views, upon this subject, we are not disposed to hold out the smallest lure to those prurient reformers, who, for trivial conformities to etymological derivation, would unsettle the orthography of our language. What should we gain by spelling—*ake*, *doctrin*, *imagin*, *insted*, *fether*, *lether*, *wether*, *fashion*, *hainous*, &c.? How far etymological whimsies might proceed in such a work of reform, it is impossible to predict, and we have no curiosity to see the experiment tried. After some effort on this subject, Mr. Webster seems disposed to give up in despair; and what makes him despond, contributes, at the same time, to remove our apprehensions.

A considerable portion of the last half of Mr. Webster's letter is employed in grammatical speculations, the result of which is, that "the errors, inaccuracies, and defects of the books on philology, which are received as authorities, are so numerous, that, if our students could be entirely freed from their influence, and their minds left perfectly unbiased, it would be a benefit to philological learning, if all their writings on this subject could become extinct, and men were obliged to begin the subject *de novo*." No doubt Mr. Webster wrote this passage with the utmost gravity, and the

most sincere convictions of its truth ; but our *prejudices* on this subject are so strong, that we can regard these remarks only as the fruits of etymological fanaticism, and cannot reply in the same spirit of solemnity by which they appear to have been dictated.

We cannot follow Mr. W. through the whole range of his grammatical wanderings ; we will, however, meet him at his starting-place. He thus addresses Mr. Pickering.

“ You and I, Sir, when in college, studied Lowth's Grammar, (now copied substantially into Murray's.) We there learnt, for example, that, ‘ in English, there are but two articles, *a* and *the* ; *a* becomes *an* before a vowel.’ I have since learnt that this is not true ; that there is no such word in English as *a*, except as an abbreviation—and that instead of becoming *an* before a vowel, the directly contrary is the fact ; that *an* is the original word, and that this, by abbreviation, has become *a* before a consonant. I have taken the liberty to correct the common error, and state what I *know* cannot be controverted. Is this *presumption* ?

“ Again—we learnt in Lowth, ‘ that *a* is used in a vague sense, to point out *one single* thing of the kind, in other respects indeterminate.’ ‘ *A* determines it to be *one single* thing of the kind, leaving it still uncertain which.’ Many years elapsed before I discovered this same *an*, or *a*, to be the orthography of *one* in our mother tongue. *An*, or *one* must be used to denote a single thing—this is its meaning. So *two*, *three*, *four*, express certain numbers, and indefinitely, just as *one* does. ‘ Go to the basket and bring me *an* apple’—any apple, that is *one*, no matter which. ‘ Go to the basket and bring me *two* apples’—any *two*, no matter which. ‘ Go to the basket and bring me *five* apples’—any *five*, no matter which, and so of every adjective expressing number, in the language. Every word expressing number is as much entitled to a separate consideration, and to be classed with the articles, as *an* or *one*.

“ But the rule is general, that *an* is indefinite. This is not true. *An* is as correctly placed before definite nouns, as before the indeterminate. London is *a* great city—Philadelphia is *a* regular city. What is city here, but a determinate city—made definite by the name ? If it should be said that its use is generally to express indeterminate nouns, I answer, this and every word of number is indefinite, till made definite by the noun it qualifies.”

Here it is to be observed, in the first place, that Mr. Webster, according to his usual practice, when he differs from the received grammarians, leaves the impression, that he has

discovered what was before unknown. This is deserving of peculiar attention, because it is not a solitary instance, in which he passes off certain old etymological wares for his own, which, in one who has discovered many things *new and astonishing*, we deem to be very unwise. When he triumphantly proclaims Lowth's account of the article to be false, and makes a solemn appeal to the publick to decide whether it is presumption in him to correct the common error, as if it were now for the first time detected, we think it due to the publick, that the account given of this little member of discourse, by certain preceding grammarians, should be briefly stated.—*Johnson*, as ignorant as he is described to have been of the *northern languages*, says, in the grammar prefixed to his dictionary—"I have made *an* the original article, because it is only the Saxon *an*, or *æn*, *one*, applied to a new use, as the German *ein*, and the French *un*; the *n* being cut off before a consonant, in the speed of utterance."—In *Lye's Saxon Dictionary*, (a work with which Mr. Webster is well acquainted,) the following account is given of this word:—" *An*. Articulus indefinitus singularis numeri, olim usitatus ante voces substantivas, cujus loco inolevit *a*; e. g. *an* man. Homo, a man;—*an* treop. Arbor, a tree;—*an* feapa. Pauci, a few."—Immediately after this, follows an account, similar to that given by Mr. Webster, of the resemblance between *an* and the Latin *unus*.—" *Æn*. Unus; gr. *Ælfr*. 14. Mat. 10, 29. Solus; 19, 17, an æfter anum. Unus post unum, alius post alium; Joh. 8, 9, &c."

What, let us ask, has Mr. Webster discovered upon this subject? What has he found out that was not known before? The philologist is deserving of praise, who revives any useful truths, that have been neglected; but let him be satisfied, in such cases, with "proposing things known, as things that are forgot." He is in danger of losing the credit to which he would otherwise be entitled, by claiming all knowledge as his own. Whether *Lowth* attended to the derivation of the article *an* or *a*, we have no means of determining. He found both forms naturalized in our language; and *a* being the prevailing form, because so much the greater proportion of nouns begin with a consonant, it was not an unpardonable crime to say, that *a* becomes *an* before a vowel.

Though we have dwelt so long upon this word, we cannot leave it without subjoining a few remarks upon its

meaning. In this respect, *Johnson*, with an acuteness which he usually displayed, when he investigated a subject with care, satisfactorily explained the word. "It is the Saxon *an* or *æn*, applied to a new use, as the German *ein*, &c. It means one, with reference to more." If *an* has not been applied to a new use, and is nothing more or less than the numeral *one*, they may at all times be exchanged for each other. Observe what kind of English this will make; with *one* indignation, arising from *one* passion, I then first discovered, &c.—He likes to indulge *one* laugh. On the other hand *an* cannot be used as a numeral, or be separated from the noun. Of two propositions *an* is false, and *an* is true. When *Johnson* says it means one with reference to more, plausible objections may be raised; but we believe it comes as near a description of its meaning as we can well express it, and when the noun, before which *an* is placed, is disencumbered of its adjuncts, and a proposition consists only of its necessary logical parts, this description of the meaning of *an* will be found sufficiently exact.

We have been thus minute upon one point, because we have not room to follow Mr. Webster through the course of his grammatical speculations;—most of them have none of the charms of novelty, and some of them tend to corrupt what is now good English, by the introduction of Saxon and Gothick usage.

The pamphlet, which has drawn from us these remarks, is well written; and, by a person accustomed to philological pursuits, and capable of forming opinions upon the subjects discussed, it may be read with advantage. It is crowded with too great a variety of matter, much of which is irrelevant to the main design, and which appears to have been here introduced, merely from the convenience of the occasion.

Certain passages, especially towards the close, might be cited as eloquent appeals to the publick, extorted by Mr. Webster's conviction of unkindness, experienced from men of letters, among his own countrymen. It is only by allowing his strong conviction of this kind, that any apology can be made for the liberal praise he bestows upon himself, and for the large demands he makes upon publick gratitude. This apology we would readily make for him, however widely we differ from him in regard to the tendency and value of his philological speculations, if it had not been his usual

practice, to bestow these praises, and make these demands, through the whole course of his literary career. Still he deserves the respect of the learned ; and whatever false notions he has, in our opinion, acquired, from directing his pursuits so intensely to etymological studies, we cannot withhold from him our tribute of regard, for his unwearied labours in tracing the history of language. It has hitherto been an unthankful task ; what it may be in future, we will not predict. Our views upon the subject, so far as it concerns our own language, are contained in this article, and in the review of Mr. Pickering's Vocabulary. We wish to prejudge nothing ; and we think Mr. Webster might have pursued his main inquiries, and arrived at the great results which he promises himself, without being diverted from his course by the publication of Mr. Pickering, whose design was limited so much to a single object, and interfered so little with the walk of the rational etymologist.



ART. V. *Childe Harold, canto 3. The Prisoners of Chillon, Darkness, &c. Poems by Lord Byron.* New York, T. & W. Mercein, 1817.

LORD BYRON'S works have been so much read, and quoted, and criticised, that we have great hesitation in offering any remarks upon them, lest our friends should take it in ill part, and think themselves invited to stale fare. We should not indeed venture to make this experiment upon the publick curiosity, did we not suppose that the proper and essential interest of the subject has been increased and kept up, by the variety of opinions and parties, to which the conduct, adventures, and writings of Lord Byron have given rise.

Lord Byron makes every thing contributive to his art ; his domestick inquietudes, his journeyings, his feelings and fancies, all go forthwith into verse. His poetry is a sort of irregular journal of his changes of place and changes of "mood," yet it never sinks into a record or halts towards a matter of fact character, but every where has the spirit and freshness of invention. He strikingly exemplifies what is said to be the characteristick of modern as distinguished from the earlier poetry ; for the objects he presents are not merely so